



INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS OFFICE

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

ISO VIRTUAL FORUM: CONTINUING STUDENTS Q&A

THURSDAY, JUNE 10, 2021

9:00AM – 10:00AM EASTERN U.S. TIME



ISO VIRTUAL FORUMS FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

The MIT International Students Office will host multiple Virtual Forums this summer to provide updates on USDHS Guidance, visa processing at U.S. Embassies/Consulates, travel questions, and additional issues impacting international students. In addition to prepared remarks, the ISO will address any pre-submitted questions in advance of the Virtual Forums, and, if time available, will answer questions posed during the Virtual Forums.

Zoom links and links to submit questions will be provided by email

***All times listed are EDT
(Eastern Daylight Time, or Cambridge, MA time)**

NEW STUDENTS

June 8 9am

CONTINUING STUDENTS

June 10 9am

ALL STUDENTS

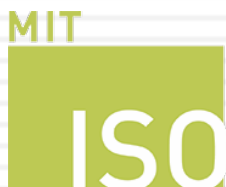
June 25 9am

July 8 6pm

July 22 9am

Aug 4 6pm

Aug 13 9am



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New Visa Documents

- New I-20/DS-2019 Certificate of Eligibility processing time = 10 business days
- Students will be sent electronic copy of Form I-20 to students to download, print, sign, and use to apply for entry visa and enter the U.S.
- J-1 visa applicants will be express mailed a paper original Form DS-2019



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Financial Support Documentation

<https://iso.mit.edu/getting-started/requesting-an-i-20-or-ds-2019/financial-documentation-requirements/>

- ❑ Costs of Attendance
 - ❑ Tuition
 - ❑ Student Activity Fee
 - ❑ Health Insurance
 - ❑ Living Expenses for Students
 - ❑ Additional Living Expenses and Health Insurance for dependent family members (required)
- ❑ Documentation to present to U.S. Embassy/Consulate at visa interview and to U.S. Customs and Border Protection upon entry to the U.S.
- ❑ Financial documentation must be submitted at time of Form I-20/DS-2019 request in iMIT
 - ❑ Need to show funding for Summer 2021 and 2021-2022 academic year
 - ❑ Graduate RA/TA/Fellowship – obtain updated funding letter from dept Grad Admin
 - ❑ Undergraduates – MIT financial aid award letter from Student Financial Services (SFS)



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Visa Processing at U.S. Embassies/Consulates Abroad

- Instructions on scheduling visa interviews, and status updates, can be accessed on the US Embassy/Consulate website where you will apply (<http://usembassy.gov>)
- Consulates resuming visa services will depend on staffing levels and any COVID-19 stay-home regulations in the host country
- Per U.S. Department of State, consulates will attempt to prioritize student visa applications based on resources and local conditions.



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Visa Interview Guidance

- Schedule interview time for whatever time you can reserve
- Procedure to request earlier visa interview time
“Expedited Interview Appointment” only possible when have an initial time scheduled (no guarantee time can be changed)
 - “Expedited appointments” may not be available at all consulates based on staffing
 - “Emergency appointments” are different, normally for travel to the U.S. for humanitarian, medical/health-related, or in support of a U.S. Citizen or Permanent Resident



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Visa Processing at U.S. Embassies/Consulates Abroad

- ❑ Visa Applications still subject to security check procedures (Administrative Processing)
 - ❑ Can be subject based on a number of factors (country of birth/citizenship; field of study; travel history; employment history; funding source; family visa history; etc.)
 - ❑ NOT possible to request expedite of Administrative Processing (security checks)
 - ❑ Embassy/Consulate does NOT have control over Administrative Processing (U.S. State Department and other government agencies in the U.S. responsible for these security check procedures)

Visa Processing at U.S. Embassies/Consulates Abroad

- Tracking New Student Visa Processing in iMIT
 - ▣ ISO developing two eforms for New Students to report status of visa processing:
 - Visa Interview Scheduled
 - Date of Visa Interview
 - Visa Status Requested
 - Consular Post City and Country
 - Visa Issued (visa and passport received from U.S. Embassy/Consulate)
 - Date visa granted / date visa and passport returned to student
 - Issue and expiration date of the visa



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Travel Restrictions to the U.S.

- ❑ COVID-19 Travel restrictions still in place:
 - ❑ Europe (most Schengen countries, including United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland)
 - ❑ China
 - ❑ Iran
 - ❑ Brazil
 - ❑ South Africa
 - ❑ India
- ❑ May not enter U.S. within 14 days since last physically present in one of the above countries
- ❑ “Non-Essential” travel restriction between U.S.-Canada-Mexico
- ❑ ISO “Visas and Travel”: <https://iso.mit.edu/visas-and-travel/>



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Travel Restrictions to the U.S.

- ❑ National Interest Exemptions (NIE) to Restrictions
 - ❑ For F-1 and J-1 student visa holders, eligible for exemption to travel restriction from the following countries:
 - F-1 students (and F-2 dependents) can enter under NIE with copy of USDOS announcement
 - J-1 students (and J-2 dependents) must obtain NIE from U.S. Consulate
- ❑ Entry to U.S. after August 1, 2021:
 - ❑ China, Iran, Brazil, South Africa, India
- ❑ Currently eligible for entry to U.S.:
 - ❑ Schengen area, United Kingdom, Republic of Ireland

Travel Restrictions to the U.S.

- ❑ For students applying for visas, NIE will be granted when U.S. Embassy/Consulate issues your F-1 or J-1 visa
 - ❑ Valid for entry for a 30 day period
- ❑ For students who already have a valid F-1 or J-1 entry visa in their passport
 - ❑ F-1 visa holders (and F-2 dependents) can enter with only a copy of USDOS announcement
 - ❑ J-1 visa holders (and J-2 dependents) must contact U.S. Consulate to obtain written NIE permission with each entry to the U.S.
- ❑ See [ISO notice](#) about NIE conditions from the USDOS



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Vaccine Information

- ❑ Please see the MIT Medical Vaccine Information Page and FAQ, which has specific information for international students: <https://covidapps.mit.edu/vaccine-information>
- ❑ If you are unable to be fully vaccinated before arrival, MIT will assist you after you arrive on campus.
- ❑ Please read all notifications from MIT regarding Vaccine and Campus Access in case there are any changes due to US Federal or Massachusetts State requirement.



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ISO Online Resources

- ❑ ISO Website: <https://iso.mit.edu>
- ❑ ISO "Visas and Travel": <https://iso.mit.edu/visas-and-travel/>
- ❑ MIT Immigration Alerts & Updates:
<https://iso.mit.edu/news-and-announcements/major-immigration-updates/>
- ❑ ISO Advisor Point-of-Contact:
<http://iso.mit.edu/about/student-advisor.shtml>



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Life at MIT Resources

- ❑ “Life at MIT” webpage: <https://iso.mit.edu/life-at-mit/>
- ❑ Transitioning to MIT
 - ❑ Connect with Student Cultural Groups
 - ❑ Obtain SIM card before arrival to US
 - ❑ Understanding Tipping
- ❑ Cultural Adjustment
 - ❑ Understand Culture Shock and the 4 adjustment phases
 - ❑ Americanisms (Hi, how are you?...and what it really means, etc.)
 - ❑ Idioms (The ball is in your court, etc.)
- ❑ [Programs & Events](#)
 - ❑ ISO Programs - “Navigating MIT” Series in fall
 - ❑ Partner Programs- Language Conversation Exchange (LCE)
- ❑ And more!
- ❑ Subscribe to ISO Newsletter (you will automatically be subscribed in Fall 2021, but you can subscribe for summer)



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Pre-Submitted Questions



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Pre-Submitted Questions

I am a fifth-year Ph.D. candidate at MIT. How long should my F1 visa be valid for me to travel back to the US? If my visa is expiring on August 4, can I travel back on August 1? I would also like to renew my visa during my visit. Since, embassies are closed in India, I want to know whether returning on old visa is possible just a few days before its expiry date? My current I-20 is valid until June 2022. What documents do I need from the ISO for visa renewal? What documents, if any, do I need from my department/advisor?

Entry visas issued by the U.S. Embassy/Consulate can be used for entry to the U.S. in that status up to the expiration date on the visa. We recommend students plan to enter a few days before just in case there are any issues that would prevent you from arriving by that expiration date (e.g. flight delays, travel restrictions, etc.).

If would be entering after the expiration date of the current visa, would need to obtain a new entry visa from the U.S. Embassy/Consulate while abroad.

If students will be applying for a new visa at the U.S. Embassy/Consulate, they should [request a new Form I-20/DS-2019](#), with updated financial documentation and new travel signature from the ISO.

Details on documents needed to apply for a new visa and to re-enter the U.S. are available on the [ISO “Visas and Travel” webpage](#) and on the [“Entering the U.S.” webpage](#).



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Pre-Submitted Questions

I am planning to travel home (to Russia) from the U.S. in August. If my return flight has a layover in the Schengen area, could that impede my entry into the U.S. on an F-1 visa? Would I need a NIE under the Presidential Proclamation, and, if so, would I need to do anything on my part to obtain the Exception?

Since the U.S. Embassy/Consulates in Russia are currently not processing new visas, please be sure that your entry visa in your passport will be valid for your planned re-entry to the U.S.

If you are traveling from or through a country that is subject to the U.S. travel restrictions (which includes the Schengen area), you need to be sure you are eligible for the NIE. F-1 visa holders can enter as they are automatically eligible for the NIE, J-1 visa holders would need to contact the U.S. Consulate in the country to obtain the NIE before being able to board the flight to the U.S. Details on the NIE, and the link to the USDOS webpage to print out to carry when traveling, are available on the [ISO website](#).



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Pre-Submitted Questions

Last time I entered the U.S. in 02/2021 (F-1), I had to go through secondary inspection (where I was just asked about my research and travel). Could that in any way affect my future admissibility to the U.S.? Does it make it more likely for me to get secondary inspection again in the future? Should I let ISO know if I get secondary inspection?

Any visa holder can be sent to secondary inspection on any visit to the U.S., so students should plan that this is a possibility. This does NOT mean that the student has done anything wrong, or that there are any problems with your documents. Rather it means that the USCBP officer needs to verify certain information before being able to grant entry that Primary Inspection does not have access to (include more details on your SEVIS record).

If there are any issues upon entry to the U.S. about your documentation or status at MIT, you can request the USCBP to call, or allow you to call, the ISO Emergency phone number (617-258-5480).



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Pre-Submitted Questions

Will the procedure for obtaining I20 travel signatures change now that MIT is lifting some of its COVID era policies?

For the foreseeable future, at least through the start of the Fall 2021 semester, students needing a travel signature will need to request a new Form I-20 (F-1 visa holders) or Form DS-2019 (J-1 visa holders) in iMIT.

Details on requesting a new Form I-20/DS-2019 are available on the [ISO "Visas and Travel" webpage](#).

The ISO will resume in-person office hours at the end of August 2021, and will send an announcement to all students to confirm official office hours and structure for walk-in or appointment service.



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Pre-Submitted Questions

My VISA expires this summer, and I cannot afford to go to my home country where the VISA was issued this summer. Would you recommend that I renew my VISA when I can travel to China in January 2022 or try to renew my VISA in Canada if the border opens up sooner than January 2022?

Your [entry visa can expire while you are inside the U.S.](#) and you can remain legally in the U.S. The visa is like a ticket to enter the U.S. You only need a valid visa to re-enter the U.S. after travel abroad. Applying for a new visa is best done in your home country or country of permanent residence, but [can be applied for in a third country if special circumstance exist](#), such as being unable to apply in home country if U.S. Consulates are closed, or you are in the third country for a purpose other than tourist. Please note that there are [currently travel restrictions between the U.S.-Canada-Mexico](#) if traveling by land border. If you want to apply in a third country, you should contact the [U.S. Consulate](#) in that country to see if they will accept an application from someone who is not a citizen or resident of that country.



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Pre-Submitted Questions

I might have to spend some of the time next year abroad. What are the F-1 regulations regarding the amount of time that I need to stay in the US?

It will be important to meet with your ISO Advisor to discuss your plans. Will you be enrolled as a full-time student during time abroad pursuing your academic program, or will you be taking a leave of absence? These are important questions.

With regards to time outside the U.S., F-1 visa holders who have been in the U.S. since August 31, 2020 are subject to the F-1 Five-Month Temporary Absence Rule and would need to limit time outside the U.S. to maintain status. J-1 visa holders, while not as specific as F-1 visa holders, would still need to demonstrate that time outside the U.S. is necessary for their academic program.



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Pre-Submitted Questions

What are ISO's plans for accommodating students who cannot travel to the US in time for the beginning of the fall semester due to travel restrictions or closed consulates? Will they be able to get remote appointments? Will there be a requirement for departments to offer hybrid instruction for students who are unable to travel to the US?

MIT has issued guidance [concerning remote appointments for the Summer 2021 and Fall 2021](#), where students are expected to return to campus with the return to in-person instruction in the Fall 2021 semester. Graduate students are expected to be on-campus to pursue their teaching/research appointments.

MIT does recognize that there may be barriers where some students will not be able to return to the U.S. (visa delays, consulate closures, travel restrictions), and MIT will work with students in that situation. If students are unable to return to the U.S., they should consult with their Graduate Administrator to submit a request for consideration of a remote appointment under the criteria outlined.

Additional guidance regarding the Fall 2021 will be released shortly and students will want to consult their academic program regarding if remote/online coursework will be available in the Fall 2021 semester.



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Pre-Submitted Questions

Are there any guidelines regarding international travelling during our summer RA-ship (not remote appointment, just travel a few weeks during the summer), i.e. if we are in the U.S. most of the time during our summer appointment, could we travel back home e.g. for a visa renewal, and if yes, for how long and what paperwork is needed?

If students have an RA/TA, and are taking a vacation to travel abroad, that is not a problem but students would not be able to pursue work related to the RA/TA while abroad without approval of a [remote appointment](#).

Students traveling and applying for a new entry visa at a U.S. Embassy/Consulate while abroad should request an obtain a new Form I-20 (or Form DS-2019) with new travel signature and updated financial documentation. Details on requesting a new Form I-20/DS-2019 for travel purposes, and applying for a new visa, is available on the [ISO “Visas and Travel” webpage](#). Students should also schedule a visa interview appointment before traveling. ISO also advises students speak with their academic advisor to have a backup plan in case the planned return to the U.S. is delayed due to visa processing or travel delays.



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Pre-Submitted Questions

I have submitted my new I-20/DS-2019 Request in iMIT. It should be under verification process. What should I do if I have not received my new document within the 10 business days processing time.

Once the Form I-20 (or Form DS-2019) is issued by the ISO, you will receive an email confirmation via iMIT that your document has been issued. While the an electronic Form I-20 will be attached to the email notification for students to download, print, and sign, the Form DS-2019 will be express mailed separately.

If you have not received your new Form I-20/DS-2019 within 10 business days, we advise that you email your [ISO Advisor](#) directly, or you may call the ISO (617-253-3795) for an update.



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Pre-Submitted Questions

I was supposed to start my degree program in-person at MIT in Fall 2020, but have been pursuing my studies remotely abroad for the year. I am planning to arrive for Fall 2021. How do I request a new Form I-20? Will my last year's SEVIS ID change or I can go ahead with DS-160 with my previous year SEVIS ID?

Students who have deferred their in-person start date in the U.S. will need to submit a “New F-1 Application” or “New J-1 Application” in iMIT, including the upload of updated financial documentation, to have a new Form I-20 or Form DS-2019 issued. Students will need to wait for notification of the new visa document being issued to confirm if the document can be issued with the same SEVIS ID number or if a new record was required, before completing a new DS-160/scheduling a new visa interview.

Please be reminded that students making their initial entry to the U.S. may not enter the U.S. any earlier than 30 days prior to the start date of the Fall 2021 semester (no earlier than August 8, 2021).



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Pre-Submitted Questions

How do I update the financial information (to include a scholarship I recently received)? Will it be a problem if my I-20 is not updated in time for my VISA interview?

If your financial information has changed, you can request an updated Form I-20/Form DS-2019 by logging into iMIT, select the left-hand menu “F-1 Student Services” (or “J-1 Student Services”), and select the button for “Funding Source Update” so a new document can be issued. You will need to update all of your funding documentation to show how you will meet costs of attendance for the upcoming academic year.



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Pre-Submitted Questions

Can a J-1 visa student travel outside the U.S. for more than 30 days without being considered to have “abandoned their program”? Which is this time for F-1 visa students?

Students must be continuously enrolled as a full-time student and pursuing in-person coursework in order to maintain their F-1 or J-1 student status (with some recent exceptions for continuing students enrolled prior to March 9, 2020 under pandemic conditions).

Students can travel for vacation periods or for academic purposes, as long as they are and have been enrolled as a full-time student, and will be enrolled as a full-time student after return to the U.S., can be considered to be maintaining status.

For F-1 students, USDHS regulations consider an absence from the U.S. for more than 5 months as more than a temporary departure and would not be maintaining F-1 status. J-1 guidance advises a student must be maintaining their status and eligibility to return to the U.S. after period abroad.



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Pre-Submitted Questions

Is it possible file my 2020 U.S. Federal and/or State income tax return late?

Students who were physically present in the U.S. for any period of time during the 2020 academic year, then you must file your income tax returns. We recommend that you file the return as soon as possible. The MIT Office of the Vice President for Finance has created a specific website for international students - ["Tax Guidance for Nonresident Aliens"](#), referring to tax status, that provides details on tax filing, payroll, tax treaties, links to past tax information workshops, and additional resources. As a reminder the ISO provides free access to the Glacier Tax Prep software to assist international students filing their Federal non-resident income tax returns. Details on how to access GTP is available on the above linked VPF webpage. Please note that GTP does have a link to the Sprintax software for filing certain State income tax returns, but students are responsible for the cost of the Sprintax software.



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Pre-Submitted Questions

Is there any forms to be done/other requirements for new M.Eng. students that's already in the U.S. and continuing to be in the U.S.? Such as check-in forms, etc.

Students moving on to a new degree program at MIT do need to request a new Form I-20/Form DS-2019 for Change of Degree/Education Level.

To request this new Form I-20/DS-2019, please login to iMIT, select the left-hand menu “F-1 Student Services” or “J-1 Student Services”, then select “Change Program Information on Form I-20” (or Form DS-2019) and complete all the eforms requested. Students will need to upload in the eforms your letter of admission to your new degree program and financial support documentation for the first year of your new degree program.

Students will be issued a new document for your new degree program, and will also need to complete the “Online Check-In” in iMIT (under the “Upon Arrival” menu) to complete your SEVIS notification that you have begun your new program of study.



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Pre-Submitted Questions

I just finished my MEng program and will start my PhD program in the fall. Is it possible to continue my summer internship in a part-time capacity on CPT or OPT during the fall semester?

If a student has completed their current degree program at the end of Spring 2021 semester, and will begin a new degree program starting in the Fall 2021 semester, to be able to work over the summer between programs a student would need to secure F-1 Post-Completion OPT or J-1 Academic Training authorization. If a student is beginning the new degree program now, during the Summer 2021 semester, then the student will need to meet with their ISO Advisor to determine if they will be eligible for CPT authorization based on the new degree program in Summer. Please note not all academic programs have internship/experiential learning opportunities in their curriculum that would be eligible for F-1 CPT authorization.

Please contact your [ISO Advisor](#) to go over any questions you have about your options.



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Pre-Submitted Questions

I have been studying remotely from abroad for the past year, and will be arriving for in-person study at MIT starting in the Fall 2021. When will I be eligible for F-1 CPT or OPT employment authorization?

Under USDHS regulations, students in F-1 status must complete in-status at least “one full academic year” of in-person instruction (combination of Fall + Spring at MIT) before being eligible for CPT or OPT authorization. So a student arriving for in-person coursework in Fall 2021 would not be eligible for CPT or OPT until after completion of the Spring 2022 semester.

The only exception to this rule is if ALL students in your academic program are required to pursue/complete a mandatory internship before being in-status for “one full academic year”. At MIT, there are only a couple of academic programs that have mandatory internship/experiences required for completion of degree that must be completed at a particular timeframe.

Unfortunately, USDHS has not amended their regulations to allow for terms pursued full-time remotely from abroad to count towards CPT/OPT eligibility, despite significant advocacy by college/universities.



INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS OFFICE

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Pre-Submitted Questions

Can I apply for F-1 OPT (Optional Practical Training) from outside the U.S.?

Unfortunately, No. USCIS regulations require that a student be physically inside the U.S. in F-1 status when the OPT (or STEM OPT Extension) application is received at USCIS.

While colleges/universities asked USDHS and USCIS to provide an accommodation for students who have been abroad during the pandemic, USCIS has confirmed that the regulations and instructions for filing the OPT or STEM OPT Extension applications have not changed.



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Pre-Submitted Questions

[For post completion OPT students] - regarding the June 1 update (May 27, 2021) from the State Department on covid travel restrictions for those coming from India, China, etc, Can students whose post-completion OPT starts on Aug 1 or later come to the US up to 30 days before the OPT start date? Or can they only come from Aug 1 onwards?

Students who have completed their program of study and have applied for F-1 Post-Completion OPT, must have the OPT approved, received the EAD card, and have a job offer for OPT in their field of study in their hands in order to re-enter the U.S.

After the student's program completion date, a student with authorized OPT cannot re-enter the U.S. until the start date on their EAD card and proof of the OPT job beginning soon after arrival. Given this, and the conflicting information we have received related to USDHS guidance, students traveling from China, Iran, Brazil, South Africa, or India on OPT would not be able to directly enter the U.S. until August 1, 2021 or after using the National Interest Exemption (NIE).



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Pre-Submitted Questions

[post-completion OPT] What can I do to make money while I am waiting for my post-completion OPT approval?

After a student's program completion date, students are **NOT** allowed to pursue any work/employment, even on-campus at MIT, until a student's Post-Completion OPT application has been approved, you receive your EAD card for the approved OPT, and the start date on the EAD card has arrived.

After OPT is approved, ALL employment must be directly related to your just completed MIT degree major field of study.

Students are allowed to remain in the U.S. as long as they have timely filed their OPT application within 60 days after degree program completion date, but are not allowed to pursue any employment (paid or non-paid) until the student has their EAD card in hand and the start date on the EAD card has arrived.



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Pre-Submitted Questions

What is the typical delay between graduation and OPT post-doc, i.e. how many months do you have to bridge without income?

Currently, processing times for F-1 Post-Completion Optional Practical Training (OPT) applications by USCIS are averaging 90-100 days from the date of receipt of the application. There is no guarantee of how long USCIS will take to process the application.



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Pre-Submitted Questions

Thinking ahead, how does the OPT work for MIT students interested in building a startup company in the US (where they are co-founders)?

Working on a startup can be complicated during a student's program of study, and would require some consultation with your ISO Advisor to determine when and how you may pursue such activity and obtain any necessary employment authorization.

We recommend that you first watch the ISO Employment Information Session, linked on the for more details, and that you read through the various employment authorization information on the [ISO "Employment" webpage](#) before scheduling an appointment to meet with your [ISO Advisor](#).

The ISO also sponsors presentations by immigration attorneys during the year that speak specifically about longer term employment visa scenarios including startups. The ISO will be sure to advertise these events in our ISO e-newsletter and ISO website.



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ISO Online Resources

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- ❑ Getting Started: <https://iso.mit.edu/getting-started/>
- ❑ ISO "Visas and Travel": <https://iso.mit.edu/visas-and-travel/>
- ❑ MIT Immigration Alerts & Updates: <https://iso.mit.edu/news-and-announcements/major-immigration-updates/>
- ❑ ISO Advisor Point-of-Contact: <http://iso.mit.edu/about/student-advisor.shtml>

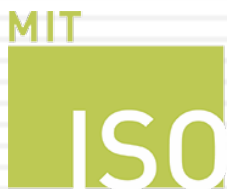


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Questions?



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